

I went in search of my ancestors this weekend. The starting point was a few years ago when I went to Edinburgh with my mum and we spent a day searching through the public records, she looking for her family, and me hunting down my dad's. I put my results between the pages of a book, and never did any more with them. Every so often, I come across the pages and read the names and the birthplaces and try to work out where it is that I come from and how these people have made me what I am.

Last Friday we went to Fort George, where my maternal grand-dad was posted and where he married my nana. She was a local girl from Ardersier, and he was born in Dundee. I never met him, as he died long before I came on the scene, and all I can remember about my nana was that she seemed to own hundreds of pairs of shoes and kept a box of sugar lumps in her wardrobe to secretly share with me.

For some reason the museum was shut which was the point of us trailing all the way there, but we had a look around the fort anyway. Quite a grand folly Fort George turned out to be, and there was a fascinating balance of history and heritage with the real-life feel of a base for currently serving soldiers. How differently squaddies look today compared to the stern photograph of my grand-dad in his kilt and moustache.

Even though the day never got me any further in finding out facts and detail about my grand-dad, at least I was able to get actually see where they started their married life together.

What surprises me most about looking at my family is how mobile they were. Somehow, I had this feeling that before our generation, people grew up in the community they were born in, married someone from nearby and then settled down and started their own family next to their parents.

But not my lot - we seemed to be wandering all over Scotland. Actually, in my dad's family it looks as if there may have been pearl fishers, who were prone to wandering in search of a living, I believe, but apart from them there doesn't seem to be any proper traveller blood in me.

So I remain wondering why my family moved around. They were working people, so the most likely explanation is they followed the work, with jobs like farm servant, plate layer, blacksmith and baker. Later generations returned to an area, perhaps where a family home or connections drew them back. Some of them couldn't write and marked their marriage certificate with a cross.

We seemed to have escaped the clearances. I had no ancestors in the Highlands at that time, they had already moved south or to the east by then. There isn't room here to discuss just how much this tragedy still affects us, both descendants of those who escaped and those who were left behind. Parts of my family, including me, started to drift back in modern times. There's a game played by us incomers where we try to outdo each other with our local credentials, hoping to belong on the basis of ancestors who left the very places that we have come to live in.

I left home at seventeen, went off to university and never returned. I felt a vague sort of inadequacy that I seemed always to be looking for the next job, the next place to live. There was a wee voice in my head telling me that I should be settling down, making a home somewhere. Well, it's taken me a lot of miles and more than twenty years, but I now live in a town where I have absolutely no family connections, where we had no childhood holidays and which I knew nothing about until almost the moment I moved here. And yet it feels like home. I have a sense of belonging that I never felt in my childhood. Maybe my search

for my past will unearth a connection with my adopted town and maybe not. At the end of the day, I am home at last.

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